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Promotion and protection of the rights of children: Promotion and protection of the rights of children

Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

Summary

Important advances on the children and armed conflict agenda have created a strong impetus for the application of international standards and norms to deliver tangible protection for children in situations of armed conflict. Concrete measures are being undertaken to ensure accountability of and compliance by those parties who commit grave child rights violations. It is imperative that the momentum that now exists is maintained and that the gains that have been made for children are consolidated and further strengthened.

The report presents an overview of the plight of children in situations of armed conflict and outlines some of the progress on the agenda for their protection. The report lays out the strategic plan of the Special Representative for advancing the children and armed conflict agenda, the key priorities, objectives and strategies.

The report concludes that broader and stronger consensus and action is required for the enforcement of international protection standards; that there needs to be equal emphasis on children in all situations of concern and on all grave violations committed against them; that deeper collaboration, collective action and pressure is required by all the key stakeholders; and that donors should provide adequate support to ensure the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of intervention programmes for war-affected children.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 51/77 of 12 December 1996, by which the Assembly established the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and requested the submission of an annual report on the situation of children affected by armed conflict. The Assembly has since extended the mandate of the Special Representative three times, most recently by resolution 60/231 of 23 December 2005. This is the ninth report on children and armed conflict submitted to the Assembly.

2. The year 2006 marks an important turning point in the development of the agenda for war-affected children, with significant developments that have again demonstrated the remarkable resolve and commitment of the international community to protect children impacted by armed conflict. An extraordinary impetus now exists for the application on the ground of international standards and norms for the protection of children. It is imperative that this momentum is maintained in order to consolidate the gains that have been registered and to further advance the children and armed conflict agenda.

3. Of particular note since the Special Representative's previous report to the General Assembly (A/60/335 and Corr.1) is the fact that Member States identified war-affected children as an explicit priority in the 2005 World Summit Outcome (General Assembly resolution 60/1), calling upon all States concerned to take concrete measures to ensure accountability of and compliance by those parties who commit grave violations against children, and welcoming the significant advances made by the Security Council to engender compliance with protection standards and norms, including through the adoption on 26 July 2005 of its far-reaching resolution 1612 (2005).

4. The General Assembly, at its sixtieth session, also voted overwhelmingly for the extension of the mandate of the Office of the Special Representative for a further period of three years, clearing the way for the appointment of a new Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict by the Secretary-General. To underline this commitment to children, the General Assembly also, for the first time, included the Office of the Special Representative in the regular budget of the United Nations for the current biennium.

5. Increasingly, actions around monitoring, reporting and compliance on grave violations against children have begun to coalesce into a concrete, systematic, and coordinated initiative that brings together all major stakeholders, including Member States, some regional organizations, key United Nations departments, offices, funds and programmes, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local civil society. It is also evident that the coordination and mainstreaming of children and armed conflict concerns into priorities, policies and programmes within the United Nations system and beyond has begun to take root in more fundamental ways.

6. The year 2006 marks the 10-year anniversary of the seminal report of Graça Machel, entitled "The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children" (A/51/306 and Add.1), which led to the establishment of the initial mandate for war-affected children and the initiation of a strategic and purposive agenda on their behalf. While much has been accomplished, it is time, together with United Nations system partners and other key players, to consider a multi-stakeholder initiative to carry out

an assessment of progress, lessons learned, good practices and challenges remaining.

7. Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy assumed the position of Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in April 2006. The present report accordingly outlines the key priorities of the Office of the Special Representative in the new phase of the mandate, including the strategies that will be employed to ensure the institution of an "era of application" of international child protection standards and norms. The report also highlights some significant areas of progress in the efforts of the international community to deliver tangible protection for children affected by armed conflict.

II. Overview of the situation of children affected by armed conflict

8. In 2000, the United Nations in Sierra Leone demobilized a boy, "Abou" who had been abducted by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) from his school in Kenema. He was only 11 years old at the time of his abduction. Four years later, by the age of 15, Abou had become a killer — a known and feared commander of the RUF rebels — one of the youngest. Abou, together with many other child soldiers, received amnesty for atrocities committed during the conflict in Sierra Leone. And although his community accepted Abou back, it was clear that many in the community were still afraid of and angry with the boy and he was quite isolated. Six months after being reunited with his family Abou disappeared. In 2003, Abou was among a number of children disarmed and demobilized in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire. He told a story of leaving his community in Sierra Leone because he was "haunted by bad spirits", and of being re-recruited to fight for the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) rebels in Liberia. He later went as a mercenary to Côte d'Ivoire together with other LURD fighters. In an interview with United Nations staff, Abou explained, "I left because what I really know how to do is fight and be a soldier, but there is peace in Sierra Leone".

9. Abou's story illustrates a terrible tragedy: of the trauma of children and the communities that they have been forced to brutalize; of the tremendous challenges to successful healing and reintegration of children into communities in the aftermath of conflict; of the recycling of children into conflicts that shift rapidly across borders; and, of children and young people who take up lives as mercenary fighters because war has become one of the only viable economic options in many of the situations around the globe that have been ravaged by long periods of conflict. These are our children, on whom all hopes for the future are pinned.

10. In stark opposition to the commitments of the international community and the significant progress that has been made on the children and armed conflict agenda, grave violations against children in situations of concern continue to be perpetrated on an alarming scale. Thousands of children are being directly affected, both as victims of violence and as perpetrators of terrible atrocities against their own communities. The resulting mental and physical trauma of these children represents a grave threat to durable peace and sustainable development, as cultures and cycles of violence are perpetuated.

11. Today, in over 30 situations of concern around the globe, children are being brutalized and callously used to advance the agendas of adults. It has been estimated that over 2 million children have been killed in situations of armed conflict, another 6 million have been rendered permanently disabled; and, more than 250,000 children continue to be exploited as child soldiers. Increasingly, children and women are the casualties of war, with the fatalities of civilians disproportionately higher than ever before in the history of warfare. Thousands of girls are being subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence and exploitation, and boys and girls are being abducted from their homes and communities on an unprecedented scale. The very places that should be the safe havens for children — their schools and hospitals — are increasingly becoming the prime targets of attack by armed parties. In many situations parties to conflict systematically deny humanitarian agencies access to territories under their control, with devastating consequences for civilian populations and especially children. In addition, the scourge of landmines claims the lives and well-being of an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 children each year. There are indications also that the trafficking of children in and from conflict zones is becoming a growing transnational trend, linked to elaborate international criminal networks. Such networks often fuel conflicts by facilitating the conversion of natural resources such as diamonds, coltan and timber into the very means and tools of war that have led to the increase in victimization and participation of children in conflict.

12. Fighting groups have developed brutal and sophisticated techniques to separate and isolate children from their communities. Children are often terrorized into obedience, consistently made to fear for their lives and well-being. They quickly recognize that absolute obedience is the only means to ensure survival. Sometimes they are compelled to participate in the killing of other children or family members, because it is understood by these groups that there is "no way back home" for children after they have committed such crimes. In an interview with United Nations staff in Liberia, a boy of 13 years admitted that he felt that he could not return to his family because he knew that his father would be angry with him for bringing men to the village who had raped and killed his mother in front of the whole family. He said that he had brought the men to the village because the commander had told him that he was going to be taken back to his family — "after that the rebels became my family and I did everything to please my father [the commander]". The considerable challenges in healing and reintegrating children into their communities in the aftermath of conflict is sometimes further compounded by severe addiction and dependency of children to hard drugs such as cocaine. In Sierra Leone, for instance, a volatile mixture of cocaine and gunpowder was often given to children to make them fearless in battle. And, because children are now also the instruments of brutality, sometimes committing the very worst atrocities, reintegration is often a complex process of community healing and atonement, and negotiation with families to accept their children back. All these dimensions of the experience of child combatants carry significant implications and challenges in terms of design and resources needs for psychosocial and other reintegration programming.

13. It is clear also that there are categories of children who are especially vulnerable in situations of armed conflict, such as girls, refugee and internally displaced children, and child-headed households. These children require special advocacy, attention and protection. The girl child is often the victim of sexual violence and exploitation, and, increasingly, girl children are being recruited into

fighting forces. In intervention initiatives for war-affected children, such as community-based reintegration programmes for children associated with fighting forces, it is girls that are most often being bypassed, even though they are in greatest need of care and services. We miss girls in our interventions because many of them are unwilling to come forward in the first place, to be identified as "bush wives" or to have their children labelled as "rebel babies". Communities often stigmatize and ostracize girls because of their association with rebel groups and the "taint" of having been raped. Often, rebel groups categorically refuse to give up the girls at all even after commitments have been made to release children, because even where associations between perpetrators and victims have begun with abduction, rape and violence, over several years "family units" have developed which include babies born of rape. In terms of programme response, all of these factors represent critical challenges for the international community, and more often than not, resources available fall short of the scope and complexity of the challenges. A deeper understanding is required of the acute vulnerability of girls in situations of armed conflict, which should inform more gender-sensitive strategies and protection and programme responses.

14. Evidence indicates that refugee and internally displaced persons' camps are often prime recruiting grounds for child soldiers because of the convenient concentrations of children in these zones. These children also face severe protection risks during flight as well as outside camp boundaries that can include killing or maiming, sexual violence, abduction and trafficking. In Darfur, Sudan, for instance, the international community has witnessed alarming levels of sexual violence, often as a deliberate strategy of humiliation and ethnic cleansing. Such attacks have been directed especially against the large populations of internally displaced girls and women. In many places, the collection of water and firewood outside the boundaries of camps has become a life-and-death gamble for girls.

15. In his fifth report to the Security Council on children and armed conflict (A/59/695-S/2005/72), the Secretary-General documented grave violations against children in 11 situations of concern, from Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, the Sudan and Uganda, to Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Colombia. Furthermore, the report explicitly cited 54 parties, both State and non-State actors, for the commission of grave violations against children. The Secretary-General indicated that the condition of children living in situations of armed conflict had improved considerably in several locations since his 2004 review, including in Afghanistan, Angola, the Balkans, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Kosovo (Serbia), and Timor-Leste. Eight parties were dropped from the Secretary-General's list of violators owing to changes in their conduct, two parties were added as the result of improved monitoring and reporting, and three parties were removed owing to a lack of verifiable information. At the same time, the plight of children in the Middle East, especially the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Lebanon, has become even graver in the recent escalation of hostilities, and the situation for children has also continued to deteriorate in crisis areas and emerging situations of concern such as Darfur and eastern Chad. In other situations such as Haiti, where the dynamics of conflict are very different, children also face similar grave violations including systematic recruitment into armed groups, death and maiming either through direct involvement in violence or in the crossfire, abduction and kidnapping and sexual violence.

16. This schematic overview is indicative of a prevailing culture and rising trends of abuse of children in the context of armed conflict. It is important to recognize, however, that there is an acute lack of definitive and reliable information and data on many aspects of the problem of children and armed conflict, and the statistics that we do have are more often than not best-guess estimates and extrapolations. The lack of reliable data represents a critical gap in knowledge that severely hampers our collective protection and programme responses.

III. Overview of progress

17. Collaborative efforts over the last eight years between the Office of the Special Representative, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other key United Nations entities, as well as Member States, regional organizations, NGOs and other civil society groups, have resulted in significant advances, actions and tangible results for children. These advances include increased global awareness of some of the issues concerning children affected by armed conflict; development and strengthening of international norms and standards for the protection of children; consistent focus and prioritization of this issue by the General Assembly; placing children and armed conflict on the international peace and security agenda through systematic engagement of the Security Council; and deeper mainstreaming of children and armed conflict in the United Nations system. The broadening of the global circle of stakeholders and action on children and armed conflict through strategic and concerted advocacy has been critical in this process.

18. Beyond the United Nations, regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States and the European Union have begun to implement the commitments that they have made to children in the context of their own peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding initiatives. Notably in recent months, the European Union adopted a strategy for the practical implementation of the European Union Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict. Also on the initiative of the European Union, a joint United Nations-European Union two-week pilot specialization course on "Child Protection, Monitoring and Rehabilitation" is being convened in 2006 as a practical measure to bring together child protection practitioners and to share and deepen expertise in support of important initiatives around monitoring and reporting on grave child rights violations. Also significant has been a more systematic inclusion of children's concerns in peace agreements, with the African Union Mediation for Darfur, for instance, explicitly incorporating children's provisions in the Darfur Peace Agreement of May 2006.

19. Important precedents have also been set in the fight to end impunity through the application of international child protection standards. For example, in October 2005 the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for five senior members of the insurgent Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), including its rebel leader, Joseph Kony, who is charged with 33 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including murder, rape, enslavement, sexual enslavement, and forcible enlistment and utilization in hostilities of children under 15 years. In March 2006, the International Criminal Court also announced the indictment of Thomas Lubanga Dyilo, founder and leader of the Union of Congolese Patriots in the Ituri region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for commission of war crimes, conscription and enlistment of children under the age of 15 and the use of children for active participation in hostilities. And, national processes in the Democratic Republic of

the Congo recently saw the successful prosecution, conviction and sentencing of Major Jean-Pierre Biyoyo of the Mudundo Forty armed group by the National Military Tribunal in South Kivu, for the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. Also for the first time, a former head of State Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, was transferred into the custody of the Special Court for Sierra Leone under indictment on 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including "conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 years into armed forces or groups, or using them to participate actively in hostilities".

20. The annual report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on children and armed conflict, and particularly the lists annexed to his report which explicitly identify parties who commit grave violations, working in tandem with the resolutions of the Security Council on children and armed conflict, represent tools designed to put increasing pressure on parties to conflict to comply with international child protection standards. These tools have been significantly strengthened and refined and it is evident that the pressure on parties is beginning to yield direct and tangible results for children. Since the adoption of the landmark Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), a number of parties have established dialogue with the United Nations within the framework of the resolution towards the preparation and implementation of time-bound action plans to prevent and end the violations for which they are cited.

21. In that regard, in November 2005 the rebel group Forces nouvelles in Côte d'Ivoire, under concerted pressure from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Côte d'Ivoire and from UNICEF, submitted to the Special Representative an action plan to prevent recruitment and to release children associated with their forces. This concrete commitment is the culmination of dialogue established by UNICEF with the Forces nouvelles since 2003. The United Nations is now working with Forces nouvelles to identify the children and reintegrate them into their communities. Pro-Government militia groups in Côte d'Ivoire have now also signalled their full cooperation towards the preparation of a similar action plan, the modalities of which are presently under discussion.

22. Also in June 2006, the Special Representative was invited by the Government of Uganda to undertake a visit to familiarize herself with the situation of children affected by the conflict in northern Uganda. While there, the Special Representative heard from survivors the horrific acts of violence perpetrated on the people of northern Uganda by LRA. She also heard from women and girls who are subject to widespread sexual violence in the camps for internally displaced persons. Addressing the presence of children among Government forces, the Special Representative confirmed that although there were indeed children slipping through established procedures into the Ugandan People's Defence Forces and the Government's Local Defence Units, there was no explicit policy of recruitment of children on the part of the Government of Uganda. To address the issue, the Government of Uganda has committed to strengthening implementation of the existing legal and policy frameworks on the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, agreeing to an action plan to: (i) sensitize various stakeholders on the national laws, international conventions and protocols against recruitment and use of children in armed forces; (ii) to monitor implementation of the various national laws, international conventions and protocols against the recruitment and use of children in armed forces; and (iii) to remove children if and when found in the armed forces. The Government of Uganda has reiterated its commitment to

appropriate disciplinary action against those military officers who knowingly recruit and use children, and has agreed to strengthen existing independent monitoring procedures for joint access to military installations by designated institutions. The Government of Uganda will also review existing laws to cover the crime of aiding and abetting of recruitment of children in armed forces by civilian officials.

23. These developments set an important precedent for the delivery of tangible protection for children in situations of armed conflict. It is now vitally important to maintain pressure and make sure that commitments that have been made are fully implemented. It is also essential to underline the critical need for additional and timely support for national reintegration efforts. Adequate support from donor agencies for child disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes encompassing all children associated with armed groups is necessary to ensure reintegration strategies that are sustainable over time and mitigate re-recruitment.

24. It is noteworthy that UNICEF is presently leading an important initiative to enhance and expand the endorsement of the Cape Town Principles and Best Practice on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into Armed Forces and on the Demobilization and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa. These principles have contributed to critical policy formulation in this area.

25. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (General Assembly resolution 54/263, annex I) presently has 121 signatories and 107 parties. The Special Representative will continue to advocate with Member States for ratification or accession to this important international instrument.

IV. Strategic plan of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

26. Since assuming office in April 2006, the Special Representative has held consultations with key constituents on priorities of her Office over the next two years. In line with her mandate, she has presented the draft strategic plan for her Office to various partners and received valuable input. The key objectives of the strategic plan are: (i) supporting global initiatives to end grave violations; (ii) promoting rights-based protection for children affected by armed conflict; (iii) making children and armed conflict concerns an integral aspect of peacekeeping and peacebuilding; and (iv) raising awareness with regard to all issues relating to children and armed conflict.

27. The strategic plan is underpinned by the Mission Statement of the Office of the Special Representative:

"To promote and protect the rights of all children affected by armed conflict".

- The Special Representative serves as a moral voice and independent advocate for the protection and well-being of boys and girls affected by armed conflict.
- The Special Representative and her Office advocate, build awareness and give prominence to the rights and protection of children and armed conflict. The Special Representative works with partners to propose ideas and approaches to enhance the protection of children and armed conflict and to promote a more concerted protection response.

- The Special Representative is a facilitator, undertaking humanitarian and diplomatic initiatives to facilitate the work of operational actors on the ground with regard to children and armed conflict.

A. Objectives

1. Supporting global initiatives to end grave violations against children affected by armed conflict

28. As an independent voice and advocate for children affected by armed conflict, the Special Representative will highlight, promote and support global initiatives by the numerous actors and entities that are focused on preventing and ending grave violations against children and bringing perpetrators of abuses to justice. The Special Representative will advocate also for rigorous post-conflict rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives and programmes for children.

29. It must be noted that one of the great advances on the children and armed conflict agenda in recent times is the intervention of the United Nations Security Council and the passing of resolution 1612 (2005) of 26 July 2005. In the resolution the Council requests a comprehensive monitoring and reporting process which may eventually lead to targeted measures against offending parties. The Council also calls for the creation of a working group of the Council to deal specifically with children and armed conflict. The primary goal of the Office of the Special Representative will be to take the lead, in close consultation with UNICEF, on issues relating to the above-mentioned Security Council process, to further deepen the engagement of the Security Council on the issue of children and armed conflict, and to ensure that the process within the Council ultimately leads to enhanced protection for children on the ground.

30. The Office of the Special Representative will also follow closely other critical initiatives, including the proceedings of the International Criminal Court in cases relating to grave violations against children, in particular child recruitment. Where appropriate, the Office of the Special Representative will consult with partners to develop legal interpretations on crimes against humanity involving children, in support of the work of the International Criminal Court.

2. Promoting rights-based protection for children affected by armed conflict

31. In addition to taking measures for monitoring and reporting violations and ending impunity, the Office of the Special Representative will promote, in close consultation with OHCHR and UNICEF, the adoption of a rights-based approach to protection issues involving children and armed conflict.

3. Making children and armed conflict concerns an integral aspect of peacekeeping and peacebuilding

32. The emphasis of the United Nations on enhancing its capacity and infrastructure for effective peacekeeping and peacebuilding represents a critical system-wide priority. The Office of the Special Representative will work closely with Member States, relevant United Nations partners and the new Peacebuilding Commission to ensure that children's protection, demobilization and reintegration needs are addressed in the initial planning and implementation of peacekeeping and

peacebuilding operations. Emphasis will also be given to the important role of child protection advisers and other child protection mechanisms in peacekeeping operations. The Special Representative will also advocate for the protection and participation of children in transitional justice mechanism and processes in the aftermath of conflict.

4. Raising awareness with regard to all other issues relating to war-affected children before, during and after conflict

33. The monitoring, reporting and compliance process that has now been established emphasizes the need to look beyond child soldiering and to recognize five other categories of grave violations against children. The Special Representative will continue to advocate against such violations wherever they occur. It is necessary to recognize, however, that the range of protection issues related to children and armed conflict goes beyond even the six categories of violations being considered in the framework of the Security Council, and includes also such issues as psychosocial recovery, the challenges of reintegration of children formerly associated with armed groups, the problems related to children under siege from HIV/AIDS, the disruption of education, the lack of access to health care and trafficking of children. Therefore, the Special Representative will aim to raise awareness and support further studies on emerging concerns for children, especially such issues as may be raised by United Nations and NGO partners, in support of a more concerted response.

B. Strategies

34. In pursuit of the objectives outlined above, the Office of the Special Representative will engage, in close consultation with United Nations partners, Member States, NGOs and civil society groups, the following essential strategies:

(a) Monitoring and reporting, especially with regard to grave violations;

(b) Advocacy, with regard to all aspects of the children and armed conflict agenda;

(c) Coordination and mainstreaming, with regard to all aspects of the agenda;

(d) Research and study, focusing on lessons learned, best practices and emerging areas of concern.

1. Monitoring and reporting

35. Monitoring and reporting on children affected by armed conflict addresses itself to six grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict:

(a) Killing or maiming of children;

(b) Recruitment or use of children as soldiers;

(c) Rape and other grave sexual abuse of children;

(d) Abduction of children;

(e) Attacks against schools or hospitals;

(f) Denial of humanitarian access for children.

36. Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), by which the Council requests the implementation of a mechanism specified by the Secretary-General in his fifth report on children and armed conflict (A/59/695-S/2005/72) to monitor and report on these six grave violations, has broken new ground in terms of the institution of practical measures towards the ending of impunity of violating parties. As such, the resolution represents a critical element of the collective efforts of the international community to secure the "era of application" of international protection standards for children.

37. Following the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), the Office of the Special Representative has been tasked with the coordination and drafting of reports from the Secretary-General to a Working Group of the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict, consisting of all its members. It is intended that reports to the Working Group should serve as "triggers for action" by the Council and other relevant policy level actors, resulting in pressure upon parties to conflict to halt violations against children.

38. The Security Council requested the implementation of the mechanism in a phased approach, beginning with five situations of concern for children that are also on the country-specific agenda for the Security Council, namely: Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, and the Sudan (these situations are listed in annex I to the report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on children and armed conflict (ibid.)). In addition, the first phase has also seen the implementation of the mechanism in two other situations of concern — Nepal and Sri Lanka — which are drawn from annex II to the Secretary-General's report, which lists situations of concern that are not on the country-specific agenda of the Security Council.

39. It is important to stress that the practice of monitoring and reporting on grave child rights violations is not a new initiative. Over the past several years in particular, the United Nations system and NGO partners have gained valuable experience in monitoring and reporting, which forms the basis of the current efforts to strengthen this critical practice.

40. The Secretary-General has submitted to the Working Group the first country-specific report on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2006/389). In the forthcoming meeting of the Working Group, scheduled for September 2006, it will issue recommendations to the Security Council on the basis of the report of the Secretary-General, and it will also consider the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Sudan (S/2006/662). For the remainder of the year, it is anticipated that the Working Group will consider reports and make recommendations to the Council on children and armed conflict in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Nepal and Sri Lanka. In addition to these country-specific reports of the Secretary-General, the United Nations Secretariat also submits for consideration of the Working Group at its bimonthly meetings a horizontal reporting note that highlights relevant development in all situations of concern for children. The horizontal reporting note represents a vital tool to flag critical emerging situations and update developments in other situations of concern.

41. Finally, it must be stressed that an effective monitoring, reporting and compliance regime depends largely on the collaboration of a number of critical stakeholders, particularly Member States, United Nations system partners, NGOs and local civil society, in situations of concern. The success of this protection

initiative will depend on how effectively collective will, resources and expertise are mobilized and deployed at the multiple levels of the mechanism — country level, United Nations Headquarters level, and the level of policymaking bodies that may undertake specific actions for the protection of children, on the basis of timely and reliable information emanating from the monitoring mechanism. The Special Representative is committed to ensuring that the space and opportunity exist for the full participation of all partners and stakeholders.

2. Advocacy

42. Targeted, concerted and strategic advocacy on all aspects of the children and armed conflict agenda will underpin the work of the Office of the Special Representative. Activities will be geared towards: (i) creating awareness and global consensus on the need to protect all children affected by armed conflict both during and after conflict; (ii) creating a broad coalition of support for the further development and application of international human rights standards as they relate to war-affected children; and (iii) advancing ideas and mobilizing support for policies within the United Nations system, regional organizations and donor aid practices to ensure that the protection of children affected by armed conflict is addressed in their peacebuilding, human rights, humanitarian, transitional and development aid strategies.

43. The Special Representative will advocate with other important "destinations for action", such as the new Human Rights Council, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the General Assembly, the Peacebuilding Commission, regional organizations, national Governments and other entities, that have different capacities and important roles to play within the purview of their own mandates, jurisdictions and responsibilities.

44. Field visits by the Special Representative and her Office are a crucial aspect of her mandate and necessary for promoting increased cooperation. Such visits enable the Special Representative to bear witness first-hand to the situation of children, to enhance dialogue with Member States, to support more effectively the work of operational partners, to elicit commitments from parties to conflict and to unblock difficult political situations, as required.

45. In addition to the mission that the Special Representative has already undertaken to Uganda, she also hopes to conduct field visits in the near future to other situations of concern, including the Middle East, Thailand, Nepal, the Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Advanced planning is also under way for a visit to Sri Lanka by a high-level special adviser of the Special Representative, with technical support of her Office's programme staff.

3. Coordination and mainstreaming

46. The mainstreaming of the concerns of children affected by armed conflict into the policies and programmes of United Nations system entities and into United Nations institutional processes is a central priority, and critical to ensuring the protection and well-being of war-affected children. Also vitally important is the mainstreaming of this issue beyond the United Nations, into the priorities and activities of regional organizations and other multilateral groupings, and into key national institutions and processes at country level.

47. The Special Representative convenes the Task Force on Children and Armed Conflict, which consists of all relevant United Nations offices, departments, funds and programmes. This forum serves as a locus of consultation and policy formulation on children and armed conflict, and as such represents an important tool for mainstreaming and coordination on children and armed conflict. A closer analysis of mainstreaming efforts will be considered in 2007, bearing in mind information already presented in the Special Representative's 2004 report to the General Assembly (A/59/426). In this regard, the Special Representative looks forward to the completion by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of a long-anticipated review on the deployment of child protection advisers, with a view to making more effective and further institutionalizing this important initiative of United Nations peacekeeping.

4. Research and study

48. As already indicated, the Special Representative is particularly concerned that in certain areas there is a lack of a knowledge base to take effective action with regard to children affected by armed conflict. For this reason the Office of the Special Representative hopes, in collaboration with its partners, and subject to funding, to stimulate research and study in a number of areas such as: 10-year review of progress and challenges since the Graça Machel report; legal research into the International Criminal Court provisions with regard to war crimes and crimes against humanity in relation to children and armed conflict; research on the girl child in armed conflict; needs and concerns of former boy soldiers, their attitudes to violence, their understanding of masculinity and their responsiveness to alternative livelihoods; lessons learned and best practices in particular successful strategies for the reintegration of children into society; children in transitional justice processes; local norms, values and practices and capacities of local civil society as a front line of protection for children.

V. Working with partners

49. Systematic engagement with Member States will continue to be an essential aspect of the work of the Office of the Special Representative, in the context of a number of different frameworks and forums, including the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Human Rights Council, with regional organizations and groupings, and in bilateral contacts with the Member States most actively engaged or affected. The Special Representative will also continue to rely on those Member States that have, for several years, formed the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict. The Friends Group has served an important advocacy role at critical moments in the development of the agenda, and will continue to be essential in this regard as we enter the "era of application" of standards for the protection of children.

50. The Special Representative is also committed to facilitating closer relations on this issue between Member States and NGOs. Early in the agenda, the Special Representative facilitated direct contact between child protection NGOs and the Security Council through the "Arria formula" on children and armed conflict, which has now become a regular practice of direct exchange prior to the annual open debate of the Security Council devoted to children and armed conflict. Deepening such engagement between Member States and NGOs is also essential. The Special

Representative has also established a structure for consultation with NGOs at United Nations Headquarters level on monitoring and reporting as well as all other aspects of the agenda.

51. The Special Representative will also advocate for greater attention and resources to local NGOs and civil society such as women's and youth groups and faith-based communities, who represent the very front line of protection for children. In conflict situations these are frequently the formal and informal protection networks and arrangements that exist when international NGOs and United Nations agencies have limited or no access.

52. The Special Representative will continue to work through the Task Force on Children and Armed Conflict to foster discussion, collaboration and cooperation to advance the agenda. The Task Force consists of UNICEF, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs, the Office of Legal Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the Department for Disarmament Affairs, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

53. With the closest United Nations partners on the agenda, such as UNICEF, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, OHCHR, UNHCR, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UNDP, more effective collaboration depends on identifying complementarity and ensuring clarity on division of labour on an issue that cuts across the mandates and responsibilities of multiple actors in the United Nations system. The mandate and role of the Special Representative is to provide leadership, visibility and greater global awareness of the rights of children affected by armed conflict and to mobilize political support and facilitate collaborative efforts on the issue across the United Nations system and beyond. The Office of the Special Representative does not have a field presence but promotes and supports the efforts of operational partners.

VI. Conclusion

54. Significant advances and momentum on the children and armed conflict agenda have now put the international community in a position to begin to redress the conspicuous imbalance between strong protection standards and the grim reality for children on the ground. We now have, as never before, the practical means and tools to end impunity of those who systematically commit the most grave violations against children, and to usher in an "era of application" of international child protection standards. What is now required most of all is the political will and spirit of common purpose and collaboration to ensure that we live up to the promises that we have made to our children. It requires a measure of introspection of all stakeholders, to determine and live up to their own particular role and responsibility to protect our children. Ultimately, it is the collective pressure and action by the diverse range of actors that compose the international community that will prevent and alleviate the suffering of children.

VII. Recommendations

55. **The General Assembly has played a critical enabling role on the agenda of children and armed conflict, and at this critical juncture I urge Member States to mobilize broader and stronger consensus and action for the enforcement of international standards for the protection for all children affected by armed conflict.**

56. **It is also critical that the international community focuses equal care and attention to all children affected by armed conflict, including through the application in all relevant situations of concern of the Secretary-General's mechanism for violations monitoring, reporting and compliance, and that we also prioritize all categories of grave violations beyond the recruitment and use of child soldiers, including the killing or maiming of children, rape or other grave sexual violence, abduction, attacks against schools or hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access for children.**

57. **I urge all stakeholders, especially Member States, United Nations entities and NGOs, to recognize the critical need and importance of genuine and open collaboration, and to ensure a spirit of common purpose and coordinated, collective action on behalf of children affected by armed conflict.**

58. **I call upon donors to ensure adequate funding for programmes for the rehabilitation and reintegration of all children that have been associated with armed forces, to ensure the long-term sustainability and success of such interventions.**